

STATEMENT OF
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MOTHER
BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON DISABILITY ASSISTANCE & MEMORIAL AFFAIRS
APRIL 24, 2007

In January of 2006, my daughter Jaime was deployed on the first tour of Iraq. A Navy Corpsman, Jaime was excited to be heading overseas. Always one for adventure, she knew that she was heading into harms way, but she was confident that she would make it home. As she prepared to leave, I whispered to her "Please don't go where I can't follow." She just laughed at me and reminded me to take care of her daughter and her horses. That was the last time I saw my daughter. She was killed by a roadside bomb on June 5th of 2006.

I have tried to keep my promise to her, but the road to where we are today has come with a price tag that I don't have the finances to cover.

When Jaime was deployed, she left me money that was to come from the gratuity that all families that lose a warrior in combat. Unless you are a family as ours. In a letter that she sent me, she wanted me to use \$75,000 of that \$100,000 for the raising of Kayla and \$25,000 for a business that we had started together. Thanks to a clause that was put into that gratuity, we were not able to get it but it was put into a trust for my granddaughter that cannot be accessed until she is 18. I have 9 years before that happens. Then as it is set up it will be issued to Kayla.

Without that money I have been faced with bills that far exceed my income. I have tried to keep up my end of the deal that I made with my daughter but that has failed. Not by my hand, but by the hand of our government.

In the days and weeks that followed her death, we had to get permanent custody of Kayla that took an attorney. We had to file for Social Security and fill our files of paperwork for the Navy so that we could get some help in raising Kayla. These papers were filled out by me and given to our CACO Chief Erdman. These papers took a good part of an hour. After doing all this, I said it was a relief that we had that done. He laughed at me and told me that it would not be the lonely time that I have to do it. I thought that that statement was a strange thing to say. He was right, I was wrong. Over the next 6 months, I filled out the same paperwork over and over again. Sometimes up to 6 times. Calling Millington became a distasteful thing.

I kept a journal at my phone and got names and extensions just so I got the same person all of the time or wrote down names of people never to call again. Two of the most memorable was the lady that had me apologizing to her for interrupting her day and the gentlemen that said he got the papers, two days later didn't get the papers, faxed me the

papers which I faxed back. Two days later, he called me back to yell at me because now he had 3 copies (my originals and two more), and he wanted to know what I was trying to pull. Amazing isn't it?

Or the Commander that is second in charge of the funds that Kayla gets every month. A retired General that I know from Iowa Falls found his name and wanted him to explain to me what a parent who was given the gratuity from her daughter that was killed in action could not get that money. After receiving his sympathy, he proceeded to tell me that it was my governments' fault that we could not get this money and that Kayla would have to learn to do without. That she would not be able to get things that she wants. He also told me that he had a daughter from a second marriage, and she couldn't have the things that she wanted because he had to pay child support and spousal support. I thought that was really strange. After all, his daughter still has parents and brother and sisters. Kayla has no parents and will never have and siblings. Some of these things have just amazed me.

In the mean time it took 3 months to get any money and the first was Social Security. This I had, then didn't have, and had, and didn't have, because the woman, Thai, was to take care of that made a mistake. By the time I was 3 months behind on my house payments and the money that Jaime was sending me to take care of our business was cut off and her death, so I got behind there and I had a little girl that needed food and new clothing to get ready for school. You see, I am myself disabled and cannot work to make money to have ends meet. By the time we got the Social Security, I was further behind.

It took a month more to get money from DFAC and from the VA. By December, I had everything that we were to get for help with Kayla, and at that time, I was so far behind that I didn't even have money for Christmas. If it weren't for a local VFW, we would not have had a Christmas. They and Target came up with \$1,000. Any money that I got after that was like sand of a fire. It just smoked.

Then came that day that I got a call from the Washington Post and Donna St. George. I call her our guardian angel because with a story by her everything started to change. People got to know of our trouble and with the help of strangers (not my government), I was able to get my house payments caught up, our electric bills and heating bills and so many bills that I couldn't pay since my daughters' death. At that time, I was two weeks away from foreclosure. Now I am caught up. I guess no one knew that if I lost my house, where would Kayla live? My struggles are not over yet, I still have a long way to go. Every month I am still worrying.

I know that the money for the gratuity changed to protect the children of the warriors that have fallen, but that doesn't always work. I have heard where it still is going to the wrong people. All it would take for this to be fixed so that it did work, would be for counselors to be brought in and lawyers to be brought in when there is a deployment. For these people who are already on staff to help our warriors make the right decisions and to fill our wills so that the people who need to be protected are protected. In my daughter's case, a little help in that area would have made the difference.

It is obvious that she thought she was doing the right thing. She wouldn't have written to letter to me telling me what to do with that \$100,000 if she had know that there would be complications. So through all of this attention that we have gotten, I get emails on a regular basis that come from our enlisted people saying that they have looked at their paperwork and found thing that are wrong. I have had tearful conversations that tell of how the wrong person would have gotten their money in case of their death, most of these coming from single parents. Most of them not knowing about the clause.

I am grateful for this opportunity to talk to you. I am grateful that there is someone listening. But it is time to start listening and tome to start hearing and making a difference. Because I have already lost a daughter. What else do you want me to loose?

Susan E Jaenke